The Critique of Criticism: Analysis of Ibn Khaldun's Objections to the Narrations about al-Mahdi

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Abstract

Belief in the advent of Imam al-Mahdi is an important tenet for the vast majority of Muslims across sectarian lines. However, some have come to question the decisiveness of the hadiths concerning the advent of al-Mahdi, especially based on Ibn Khaldun's arguments in his *Muqaddimah*. The current work is a translation of Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi's masterful refutation of Ibn Khaldun titled 'Removing the Doubts of Ibn Khaldun'. Maulana Thanwi demonstrates that the belief in al-Mahdi is proven through an early consensus, that the narrations regarding him are numerous to the point of continuity [*tawatur*], and lays bare to the reader the underlying weakness of the arguments against Imam al-Mahdi's advent. The translation of the work is further supplemented by the translator's research on the narrations discussed in the work and the concomitant analysis, which are presented to the reader as footnotes.

1. Introduction

In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun has quoted the arguments of those who deny the advent of al-Mahdi. He also appears to be inclined to the same view and has, therefore, quoted those arguments rather assertively. Even though the author is not an authority in hadith sciences,[2]

it was feared that some simpleton may fall for his arguments. Therefore, it was considered important to pen down some points as a cogent response to the immature doubt-raising questions.[3]

2. The Advent of al-Mahdi is Proven through Consensus [*Ijma'*]

Highlighting criticism on some of the narrators of the reports about al-Mahdi, Ibn Khaldun has raised the question that one might say such doubts can be raised about the narrators of the two Sahihs[4] as well. He then answers the question that even though there can be doubts of similar nature about the narrators of the two Sahihs as well but they are not taken into account because these two Sahihs have been well received and there is consensus on this point and, therefore, those doubts do not affect the authenticity [of the reports in the two Sahihs]. This tells us of a principle accepted by Ibn Khaldun that in matters where general consensus is reached, faults with the narrators are not harmful. Here we say that just as there is general consensus on the acceptability of the two Sahihs, the narrations

about the advent of al-Mahdi are also [accepted] by consensus. Just as the opinion of some who question the acceptability of the two Sahihs is not considered to nullify the consensus, the words of antagonists will not affect the consensus about al-Mahdi.[5]

This is because consensus only means a general consensus and the view of a few antagonists is not given any consideration. In both cases consensus is of equal degree. Therefore, none of the reliable scholars and hadith authorities has gone against this consensus. In fact, as stated by Ibn Khaldun himself, "al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, al-Bazzar, Ibn Majah, al-Hakim, al-Tabarani and Abu Ya'la al-Mawsili"[6]

 have mentioned these traditions on the authority of a number of Companions including 1) 'Ali, 2) Ibn 'Abbas, 3) Ibn 'Umar, 4) Talhah, 5) Ibn Mas'ud, 6) Abu Hurayrah, 7) Anas, 8) Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, 9) Umm Habibah, 10) Umm Salamah, 11) Thawban, [12) Qurrah b. Iyas, 13) 'Ali al-Hilali and 14) 'Abdullah b. Harith b. Jaz] among others[7] through different chains of transmitters. Therefore, just as faults with certain narrators in the two Sahihs do not have any effect on the consensus about their reliability, similarly faults with some of the transmitters of the reports about al-Mahdi do not affect the consensus regarding his awaited advent. In fact, the consensus about al-Mahdi is more worthy of acceptance than the consensus on the acceptability of the two Sahihs because it [the former] is built upon reported text whereas the consensus about the two Sahihs is based on opinion, as the author accepted the two Sahihs as evidence for his opinion [without any text supporting it]. In fact, on the question at hand even if the authority of consensus was not known it would still have been based on text [*nass*] as its subject matter cannot be ascertained through mere opinion [*rai*]. In this case, however, the authority of consensus is actually known. Moreover, whereas the knowledge of the chain of authorities for the point of consensus is not even essential to support the word of the erudite scholars, its knowledge, albeit through weaker links, will add to and strengthen the consensus. That there is no report about al-Mahdi in the two Sahihs does not impugn the general consensus for two reasons. Firstly, because it is incorrect to say that there is no such tradition in the two Sahihs. In fact, it is there in Sahih Muslim even though it is not categorical,[8] but the equivocal [*mubham*] shall be viewed in the light of the unequivocal [*mufassar*] as explained in the following lines. Therefore, even the two Sahihs are not without narrations on the subject. Secondly, as clarified by the masters of hadith sciences [*muhaddithin*] and juristic theory [*usuliyin*], consensus does not require positive evidence from all individually; rather, publishing of the opinion of one and the absence of criticism by others is enough to prove it. Thus, as long as there is no proof of al-Bukhari's and Muslim's denial of this narration, it [the lack of positive evidence] does not impugn the consensus.[9]Furthermore, the narrations on the subject were well known even before al-Bukhari and Muslim and no one denied it. Thus, the consensus was [already] reached and the dissent of certain later people does not nullify the consensus of the earlier generations. For this reason, the fact that there is general consensus on the advent of al-Mahdi has been acknowledged by the author as well. He writes, "*it has been well known [and generally accepted] by all Muslims in every epoch, that*

at the end of time a man from the family [of the Prophet] will without fail make his appearance . . ."[10]

3. The Narrations of al-Mahdi are *Mutawatir*

Though the scholars of hadith have differed about the specification of hadith as continuous [*mutawatir*], well-established authorities have clarified that if the hadith works are carefully traced, a [large] number of reports would be found reaching the degree of continuity [*tawatur*].[11] Therefore, it is evident that the number of narrations about al-Mahdi are so numerous that they certainly reach this degree like many other narrations. As indicated under heading 2, the narrators of this tradition at each step are so many that together these individual chains of the authorities can be graded as continuous. It is established that for continuous reports the reliability of [all] the narrators is not required. What effect, therefore, will the weak and contentious criticism have in the context where even strong criticism does no harm?

4. Criticism of Hadiths about al-Mahdi is Disputed

 Ibn Khaldun has himself quoted from other hadith authorities the reliability of most of the narrators who have been criticized. The criticism, therefore, is disputed and for this reason before quoting negative criticism Ibn Khaldun has highlighted the principle of negative criticism taking precedence over positive criticism.[12] Firstly, this principle itself is presumptive [*zanni*]. Secondly, it is subject to much discussion. Thirdly, reliability is [established] a priori for a Muslim [especially of the first three generations] and by dint of the principle 'certainty is not undone by doubt' there is room for giving precedence to positive criticism over negative criticism where most of the negative criticism is disputed as stated by the author himself. Fourthly, this negative criticism can be harmful only when supported by continuity or consensus which is not the case here.

5. Weakness, if any, is Compensated by Multiplicity of Narrations

As stated by the hadith scholars, the weakness of a report is compensated by a multiplicity of chains of authorities. So when the agreed-upon weakness is compensated for in this manner, why would the differed-upon weakness not be compensated for, especially when the multiplicity [of chains] can be considered as reaching the degree of continuity [*tawatur*] as mentioned above?

6. Consensus was Reached Before the Criticized Narrators

As per the pronouncement of the scholars, a *mujtahid*'s invoking a narration as proof is considered his authentication of it[13]

and the weakness of later narrators does not call into question the earlier scholars' reliance [*ihtijaj*] upon the narration.[14]

 Therefore, when the scholars preceding the impugned narrators believed in this prophecy, they [by implication] attested to the reliability of the traditions on the subject, and the weaknesses that crept into the chain at a later point in time does not affect their presenting evidence with the traditions. As for later scholars taking the tradition as authentic on the authority of predecessors [*salaf*], its continuity to them is like the suspended reports [*ta'liqāt*] of al-Bukhari. When al-Bukhari brings a narration without a chain of narrators where he [is known to have] ensured its authenticity, its chain of narrators is not [ordinarily] searched for and his authentication is relied upon. However, it is confirmed that al-Bukhari has actually quoted it. We have proved that if authentication is attributed to the earliest generations then the evidence of the later generations is also verified.

7. Ibn Khaldun did not Prove the Weakness of all the Narrations

7.1 Narrations Explicitly Mentioning the Name al-Mahdi

The author has failed to criticize certain hadiths which explicitly mention the name al-Mahdi.[15] He has brought al-Hakim's narration[16] through Sulayman bin 'Ubayd and quoted al-Hakim's saying, "*it is a sound one as far as its chain of transmitters is concerned, though neither [al-Bukhari nor Muslim] published it.*"[17] His subsequent statement that "*none of the authors of the six authoritative collections of traditions published a tradition of Sulayman bin 'Ubayd*" is not harmful to the cause as no one has ever mentioned that this is a cause of a narrator's weakness. For this reason even the author was not content at this and added, "*However, Ibn Hibban mentioned him in al-Thiqat and we have seen nobody who discussed him adversely.*"[18]

Discussing another hadith[19], he has quoted the words of al-Hakim "*this is a sound tradition according to the conditions laid down by Bukhari and Muslim*" and has proven that it is not per the conditions of Bukhari and accepted that "*it is sound only according to the conditions laid down by Muslim*" for its chain has narrators from whom al-Bukhari has not narrated though Muslim has. As regards the observation about the pro-Shi'a sentiments of 'Ammar al-Duhni it does no harm after accepting that he is a narrator in [Sahih] Muslim and the narrations of Muslim are sound. It is obvious that the reliability of Muslim's narrations cannot be merely for the fact that he is Imam Muslim, rather it is due to the fact of his being a great critic who does not transmit from weak narrators. Therefore, his narration on the authority of 'Ammar al-Duhni shows he does not consider criticism against him enough to impugn the soundness of the hadith.[20] This is due to the fact that on the question of reliability it is the truthfulness and retention that matters [more than doctrinal inclination].[21] Most critics narrated the hadith upon satisfaction on these two accounts.

Thus, 'Ammar's being a narrator with Imam Muslim is enough for the soundness of the hadith.

7.2 Reports that do not Mention the Name al-Mahdi

And some hadith reports [that Ibn Khaldun did not show as weak] do not explicitly mention the name al-Mahdi like al-Hakim's narration through 'Awf [bin Abi Jamilah al-'Arābi] for which he quoted al-Hakim's words, "*it is sound according to the conditions laid down by al-Bukhari and Muslim, though neither of them published it.*"[22]

He has also quoted a narration of al-Tabarani[23] without mentioning any fault with it. As regards the statement of al-Tabarani, "*it was transmitted by a number of persons on the authority of Abu al-Siddiq. None of them inserted another transmitter between him and Abu Sa'id except Abu al-Wasil. He transmitted it on the authority of al-Hasan bin Yazid, on the authority of Abu Sa'id,*" it is not harmful because according to the hadith scholars addition of a reliable transmitter is acceptable. It is addition, not a contradiction, because in other narrations Abu al-Siddiq reports on the authority of Abu Sa'id without mentioning the manner of transmission. Therefore, other chains of transmitters do not contradict this. What harm does it do when it is simply an addition and the narrator is trustworthy? It may be argued that the author has quoted from al-Dhahabi that al-Hasan bin Yazid is little known [*majhul*]. This is vague [*mubham*] negative criticism and it is overruled by positive criticism which is quoted immediately next to it by the author, "*he was mentioned by Ibn Hibban in al-Thiqat.*"[24] It is like Abu Hanifa's criticism on Zayd bin 'Ayyash, a narrator of hadith about the sale of wet dates, that he is little known [*majhul*] and all other hadith scholars responded that Zayd is so-and-so and if Abu Hanifa did not know him, others did. If it may be argued that about the transmitter of the hadith, Abu al-Wasil, the author has mentioned, "*no tradition of Abu al-Wasil was published by any of the six authors of the authoritative collections*" then the objection has already been answered. Further, the author himself writes, "*He was mentioned by Ibn Hibban in al-Thiqat in the second category and Ibn Hibban said regarding him, 'he transmitted traditions on the authority of Anas, whereas Shu'bah and 'Attab bin Bashir transmitted traditions on his authority.'*"[25] When Shu'bah – 'the leader of the faithful in Hadith' – narrates from him, the six authoritative works not having reports from him is irrelevant.

7.3 Hadith Reports from Sahih Muslim

The author, Ibn Khaldun, also mentions a couple of reports from Sahih Muslim.[26] There is another hadith in Sahih Muslim that he did not quote. It says, [Jabir bin 'Abdullah said: I heard the Prophet say:] *". . . 'Isa bin Maryam will descend and their leader will say: 'Come and lead us in prayer,' but he will say: 'No, you are leaders of one another,' as an honor from Allah to this Ummah.*"[27] These narrations are reliable according to the author as well. This is the reason that after criticizing various hadiths he had to make the exception, "*these are*

all the traditions published by the religious authorities concerning al-Mahdi and his appearance at the end of time. One has seen what they are like. Very few are above criticism."[28] Firstly, to say that the authentic hadiths are only a few is not true. The number of traditions reported by the author are five to six hundred and calling that 'a few' is not justified. This is known to the experts of hadith. Moreover, even if this claim is accepted, it does not call into question the issue of al-Mahdi since solitary reports are also a proof in shariah especially for issues whose denial [*inkar*] is just an innovation [*bid'ah*] [and] not outright disbelief [*kufr*]. The issue of the advent of al-Mahdi is from this category. It is practically like a well-reported thing as it is supported by a number of other factors already mentioned. One may argue that regarding these traditions [from Sahih Muslim] the author said, "*[Muslim's] traditions do not mention al-Mahdi, and there is no evidence in them to show that al-Mahdi is meant in them.*"[29]The response to this objection is that an absence of explicit mention of the name of al-Mahdi is not a problem.

7.4 Unequivocal Narrations Explain the Equivocal

The author's argument is "there is no evidence that al-Mahdi is meant in them" but if an evidence is produced his argument will be nullified. It is thus submitted that hadith scholars are nearly unanimous that if one text or chain of authorities of one hadith is equivocal [*mubham*] and that of another are unequivocal [*mufassar*] and there is reasonable evidence to prove the connection between the two, the equivocal shall be understood in the light of the unequivocal. Besides the hadith scholars, the author himself has accepted this principle. At one place in the discussion, the chain of authorities of a hadith from Sunan Abu Dawud quoted by the author is, "*Abu al-Khalil Salih, on the authority of one of his colleagues, on the authority of Umm Salamah . . . ,*"[30] and just after a few lines he quotes the hadith with another chain, "*Abu al-Khalil on the authority of Abdullah bin al-Harith, on the authority of Umm Salamah.*"[31] At this point the author says, "*This clears up the identity of the transmitter, whose name was not mentioned in the first chain of transmitters.*" (Then the author says, "*The transmitters in it are the transmitters of the two* Sahihs. *One could not attack them or find fault with them,*" though then he raised two objections; firstly, Qatadah is said to be *mudallis*[32], which the author himself says in a doubtful tone [*sighah al-tamridh*] and secondly the very objection we are answering here that it does not mention the name of al-Mahdi. Anyhow, it is only as a parenthetical note and is not directly related to the point at hand). This clarity brought about by the second chain shows that the ambiguous shall be interpreted according to the elaborate, otherwise one could say that in the first chain there is no mention of the name of the companion [of Abu al-Khalil] [so] how could it be known. In short, it is established from the hadith scholars, and the author has himself accepted and acknowledged this principle. Upon comparison, the proximity between the chains of the transmitters and the contents of the reports that explicitly mention the name of al-Mahdi and those that do not will make it evident to every reasonable person that they refer to the same person.

The fact that all the hadith scholars have placed these vague traditions [not mentioning the name of al-Mahdi] in the chapters concerning al-Mahdi is a categorical proof for this. The author has himself quoted the saying of some hadith scholar, "*it has been said that al-Tirmidhi's tradition is an interpretation of the traditions transmitted by Muslim in the Sahih.*"[33] As for his mentioning it with a weak expression it does not undermine our objective for we are not for deriving any conclusions from the author's statement; rather our objective is to show the position of the hadith scholars. The way this principle is supported by the author's own words has been mentioned already. It is, therefore, conclusively proven that the reports unequivocally mentioning the name al-Mahdi and the reports not mentioning it are one in their origins. That the name is not mentioned in some reports has no adverse effect on our conclusion and seeking far-fetched meanings does not deserve serious attention. The reason they do not deserve any serious attention is that they are not supported by evidence, in fact, some of them have implications against the evidence and are, therefore, null and void. Secondly, even to the oblivion of these unclear hadiths not mentioning the name al-Mahdi, the narrations with explicit mention are enough because, as already indicated, in such matters even solitary reports are an evidence especially when they are supported by numerous strong corroborations as has been repeatedly stated.

The example of the principle of using the unequivocal to understand the equivocal is like a person who says, 'a person with such and such qualities visited me today' and then says, 'Today Zaid who has such and such qualities visited me' and mentions the same qualities. Everyone will understand that the unknown person in the first statement was Zaid.

8. Authenticity and Meaning of the Hadith, "There is no Mahdi except 'Isa"

 Some deniers of al-Mahdi have sought evidence with the tradition, "*There is no Mahdi except 'Isa bin Maryam*" [لا مهدي إلا عيسى بن مريم], however, this evidence is not solid, firstly, because, as acknowledged by Ibn Khaldun, the tradition is weak and perplexed.[34] Secondly, it is open to interpretation. In fact, due to the established authority of reports about al-Mahdi, most certainly it has to be interpreted away from its apparent meaning because the characteristics of al-Mahdi mentioned in the hadith prove the difference between al-Mahdi and 'Isa. Thus, when the apparent meanings are not possible, it must be interpreted figuratively. As for its various interpretations, some said it is related to the cradle [*mahd*] as quoted by the author, though he has shown its weakness as well by contrasting it to the hadith about al-Juraij.[35]However, if it is considered specific to the Prophets alone, the author's objection can be answered. Some understood the word 'mahdi' rather literally [i.e. guided one], and by the rule that when the absolute is referred to absolutely it implies perfection [الكامل الفرد به اذا راد به اطلق اذا المطلق] only a Prophet can be the perfectly guided one. The implication, thus, would be 'there is no one perfectly guided [*mahdi al-kamil*] after me except 'Isa.' To elaborate, with his saying "*There*

is no prophet after me", the Prophet announced that there would not be any prophet after him. This general statement implied that after him there would be no prophet, neither in independent capacity nor as his follower. So he denied this notion and said "'Isa would come as my follower", and since in the independent capacity the role of the guide [*hadi*] is more evident in a Prophet, and as a follower the characteristic of being a guided one [*mahdi*], so much so that his role as the guide springs from his being the guided one himself. In this sense 'Isa has been termed as *mahdi*. In other words, it means as a follower only 'Isa would come as a prophet after him. The third interpretation, which is the easiest, simplest and closest to the wording of the narration, this author [i.e. Maulana Thanwi] writes through an inspiration from Allah with the confidence that this is the actual meaning of the hadith: this scheme of words is used to denote unity and proximity between two things. As such, it means al-Mahdi and 'Isa are one, where al-Mahdi is the subject and 'Isa is the object. Unity and proximity with regards to the object is at times real and at times figurative. For instance, when two things are in chronological proximity and one of them is a sign of the other they are considered subject and object with regards to the time factor as in the following hadith:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «عمران بيت المقدس خراب يثرب، وخراب يثرب خروج الملحمة، وخروج الملحمة فتح قسطنطينية، وفتح القسطنطينية خروج الدجال»

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: The flourishing of the state of Jerusalem [*will be at the time of*] the destruction of Yathrib, the destruction of Yathrib [*will be at the outbreak of*] the Great War, the outbreak of the great war [*will be at*] the conquest of Constantinople, and the conquest of Constantinople [*will be when*] the Dajjal [Antichrist] comes forth.[36]

In this hadith there are four issues where the object relates to the subject in the same sense [of cause and effect]. If this is understood, the meanings of "'Isa bin Maryam is Mahdi" become crystal clear that the descent of 'Isa will follow the advent of al-Mahdi. Therefore, the proximity of time brought about the figurative unity of the two. Anyway, the evidence of the deniers of al-Mahdi is rendered null and void.

9. Al-Mahdi and the Sayings of the Sufis

Thereafter, the author has mentioned the opinions of the Sufis [mystics] on the subject and criticized it. But it is also not harmful to the case because it rests on authentic hadiths, not mystic unveiling [*kashf*]. However, unveiling leads to peace of mind, and though it is not a shariah evidence, the shariah has not rejected it either. In fact the shariah sources prove it. This is the reason dreams which are lesser than unveiling [in terms of bringing about peace of heart and mind] have been mentioned in the authentic hadith reports in the same vein. Regarding Laylatul Qadr, it has been said, "*it seems that all of your dreams agree that [the*

Night of Qadr] is in the last seven nights,"[37] and concerning Azan it has been stated in a hadith, "*this is a true dream.*"[38] Another hadith says, "*[good] dreams are from Allah,*"[39] and "*nothing has been left out of the Prophethood except dreams with glad tidings*"[40], and [there are] other reports. When the weak has a standing why would the strong not have a standing? Further, unveiling [*kashf*] is explicitly proven from the hadith. For 'Umar to be pronounced as '*one spoken to*' [*muhaddath*] is a proof for this. Moreover, it is reliably reported that the Companions and many pious people gave information through unveiling. And its turning out exactly like that is proven through continuous [*mutawatir*] reports, so how can it be denied? However, an unveiling that contradicts any shariah precept is either to be rejected or requires an interpretation. Otherwise, it is valid in its own right and if it goes with the hadiths and corroborates them, its approval is beyond question. Further, if it mentions something not stated in the hadith it cannot be reasonably termed as a contradiction nor does it impugn that entire unveiling. An example is what the author has quoted from Ibn al-'Arabi who said, "*his appearance will take place when kh-f-j years have passed after the Hijrah*" and then explained it saying:

He wrote down three letters. He meant their numerical value, *kh* being 600, *f* 80, and *j* 3. This makes 683 years, or the end of the seventh century.[41]

After interpreting it this way Ibn Khaldun objects, "*this time passed and al-Mahdi did not appear.*" One principal response has already been given that a secondary aspect going wrong does not call into question the real point of the unveiling [*kashf*]. Secondly, this objection is on the stated interpretation which is not certain because it is only a view of Ibn Khaldun. It is possible that Ibn al-'Arabi had used it in some other way. In fact it is quite probable approaching certainty, as this scribe [i.e. Thanwi] saw a treatise based on unveilings titled "al-Shajrah al-Nu'maniyyah"[42] in Makkah. It has a number of prophecies, some of which has actually come to pass and the commentators have explained it not according to the numerical values but in some other way which this scribe could not ascertain despite much brainstorming. And strangely the employed idiom is not even consistent, rather it varies at every instance because their [the mystics'] intent was to keep these things hidden. Therefore, they have employed different symbolism. And then fearing that someone may understand they strongly implored the reader that he must not pronounce even if he ever understands. Interestingly, even the commentators who have solved the symbolism have done so in code words of their own and then in turn they made similar imploration. In this backdrop how is it possible that Ibn al-'Arabi meant the alphabetic [*abjad*] values because these values are so well known that even the children know them. How then was keeping it secret possible and what was the utility of all the imploring if it was something understandable to even the masses? In fact, strong imploration testifies that the intent of Ibn al-'Arabi was to keep it secret and therefore encoding it with such a well-known method would have defeated his very purpose. Using the same logic Ibn Khaldun has himself criticized those who try to find the buried treasures using symbols:

Buried treasures (*rikaz*), such as are mentioned in the Prophetic traditions and such as the jurists assume to exist – that is, buried in pre-Islamic times – are found by chance, not by systematic search. Furthermore, why should anyone who hoards his money and seals it with magical operations, thus making extraordinary efforts to keep it concealed, set up hints and clues as to how it may be found by anyone who cares to? Why make a written list of it, so that the people of any period and region could find his treasure? This would contradict the intention of keeping it concealed.[43]

Thus, the encryption involved is unknown and without knowing the encryption rule how can any interpretation be made. Elsewhere [in the same book], Ibn Khaldun writes: "*because only previously known or established rules can lead to the decipherment of such puzzles.*"[44] Therefore, when the authenticity of the author's interpretation [of Ibn al-'Arabi's words] is not proven, rather it is proven otherwise by the arguments above, the objection itself is rendered null and void. Whereas, the validity of unveiling [*kashf*] is proven by hadith and the author himself acknowledges it elsewhere in the same book.

It is well known that (supernatural perception) occurs among the (Sufis). They call their supernatural experiences and mind reading "physiognomy" (*firasah*) and "removal" (of the veil of sense perception, *kashf*). Their experiences of supernatural activity they call "acts of divine grace" (*karamah*). None of these things is unworthy of them. [45]

Once its validity is also acknowledged [along with the weakness of the objection raised] all the questions are rendered null and void.

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References and Notes:

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[1]* The original title of the treatise is (خـلدون ابـ ن عن الـظ نون مؤخرة) (Removing the Doubts of Ibn Khaldun). It is included in Imdad al-Fatawa, Karachi: Maktaba Darul 'Uloom, 2010 Vol.6, 247-256

"Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi – referred to as *Mujaddid al-Millat* (the Renewer of the Community) and *Hakim al-Ummat* (Physician of the Community) – is arguably the most famous graduate of Dar al-'Ulum Deoband. . . . He was one of the most prolific writers in the history of Islam and wrote books on practically all of the Islamic disciplines. . . . He died in 1362/1943." See, Taqi Usmani, Muhammad, *The Great Scholars of the Deoband Islamic Seminary*, London: Turath Publishing, 2013, p40.

[2] Shaykh Ahmad Shakir (1377/1958) writes:

أما ابن خلدون، فقد قفا ما ليس له به علم، واقتحم قُحَما لم يكن من رجالها، وغلبه ما شغله من السياسة وأمور الدولة، وخدمة من كان يخدم من الملوك والأمراء، فأوهم أن شأن المهدي عقيدة شيعية، أو أوهمته نفسه ذلك

"As for Ibn Khaldun, he went after what he had no knowledge of. Without consideration he plunged into matters he was not expert at. He was rather occupied by affairs of politics and statecraft, and serving the courtiers of the kings and ministers. They made him to fall for the idea that al-Mahdi is the belief of the Shi'ites [alone], or he fell into this inadvertence himself . . ." See, *Musnad Ahmad*, Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1995, Vol.3, 492, Hadith 3571.

[3] Maulana Thanwi was not the only one to refute Ibn Khaldun's objections. Sh. Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Siddiq al-Ghumari (d. 1380/1960) produced a dedicated treatise on the subject, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun min Kalam Ibn Khaldun* (Exposition of Hidden Defects in Ibn Khaldun's Arguments [about al-Mahdi]), and many others including Ahmad Shakir, al-Albani, and 'Abdul Rahman al-Mubarakpuri have commented on Ibn Khaldun's arguments discussing the various narrations about al-Mahdi.

[4] i.e., Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim

[5] Also see, Al-Ghumari, Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Siddiq, *Ibraz al-Wahm al-Maknun min Kalam Ibn Khaldun*, Damascus, Matb'ah al-Tarqi, 1347 AH, 446-447. The copy I have starts the page numbering from 432. Perhaps it was originally a part of some larger collection.

[6] Ibn Khaldun failed to mention Ahmad, al-Dani, al-Daraqutni, al-Harith bin Abi Usamah, Abu Nu'aym, al-Khatib, and Ibn al-Asakir who have also narrated hadith reports about al-Mahdi in their well-known works. In fact, Muslim has also narrated reports about al-Mahdi, though without the mention of the name. (See notes 26 and 27 below)

[7] This is by no means an exhaustive list of Companion narrators of the reports about al-Mahdi. Among others who narrated are 15) Jabir bin Abdullah (see note 27), 16) Huzayfah bin al-Yaman, 17) Uthman, 18) Abu Umamah, 19) 'Ammar bin Yasir, 20) Jabir bin Majid, 21) 'Abdul Rahman bin 'Awf, 22) 'Imran bin Husain, 23) Hussain bin 'Ali, 24) Tamim al-Dari, 25) 'Amr bin Marrah al-Juhni, and 26) Ma'az bin Jabal. See al-Kattani's *Nazam al-Mutanathir min al-Hadith al-Mutawatir*, Cairo: Dar al-Kutab al-Salafiyya, 225-6, and *Ibraz al-Wahm*, 437-438. In total, therefore, we have the names of 26 Companions who narrated from the Prophet on the issue. The number of reports from the Companions and the Followers (*tabi'in*) is very large.

[8] See section 7.3 below

[9] As a matter of fact, al-Bukhari did narrate reports about al-Mahdi though not in al-Sahih but in another work. In his Tarikh al-Kabir he has mentioned two reports on the subject; one from the Prophet reported by Umm Salamah and other from Sa'id bin al-Musayyib. See Tarikh al-Kabir, vol.3, 346 and vol.8, 406

[10] Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Trans. Franz Rosenthal, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980, Vol.2, 156. All the references to *Muqaddimah* are from the 1980 reprint of the translation. The translation has been emended at times for the purpose of maintaining flow and clarity.

The Inconsistency of Ghamidi School of Modernism:

This confession by Ibn Khaldun highlights the inconsistency of the modernists on the scale of Ghamidi who on the one hand say "sunnah" is something transmitted continuously from generation to generation and is as such in no need of specific narrations and on the other refer to Ibn Khaldun's criticism of the narrations about al-Mahdi. If this statement is true and there is no evidence to doubt it then these modernists should not have any interest in the authenticity of these narrations. Moreover, it also strikes at the roots of the attempt to interpret the selected narrations on the subject to mean 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Aziz. A separate paper analyzing such an interpretation is forthcoming.

[11] A number of scholars have clarified this and some have produced dedicated works on the subject to show the continuity (*tawatur*) of the hadiths on the subject. These include Abu al-Hasan al-Abri, al-Qurtubi, al-Sakhawi, al-Suyuti, Ibn Hajar al-Haithami, al-Zarqani, al-Qanuji, al-Shawkani, etc. (See, al-Ghumari, *Ibraz al-Wahm*, 433-434)

[12] This principle, though true, is neither absolute nor unrestricted. There are many conditions attached. Gradation of a narrator as reliable is accepted without looking for any details, but negative criticism has to be elaborate making the reason for weakening of the narrator clear. Even in the two Sahihs there are narrations from narrators who have been criticized by some but for invalid reasons or without due explanation. See, al-Ghumari, *Ibraz al-Wahm*, 459-466.

For further details and scholarly references see 'Uthmani, Zafar Ahmad, *Qawa'id fi 'Ulum al-Hadith*, Ed. Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah, Karachi: Idarah al-Qur'an wa 'Ulum al-Islamiyyah, n.d., 167-175.

[13] 'Uthmani, Zafar Ahmad, *Qawa'id fi 'Ulum al-Hadith*. Ed. Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah. Karachi: Idarah al-Qur'an wa 'Ulum al-Islamiyyah, n.d. 57-59

[14] Defending the early luminaries of the ummah, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

بل الذين كانوا قبل جمع هذه الدواوين كانوا أعلم بالسنة من المتأخرين بكثير؛ لأن كثيرا مما بلغهم وصح عندهم قد لا يبلغنا إلا عن مجهول؛ أو بإسناد منقطع؛ أو لا يبلغنا بالكلية, فكانت دواوينهم صدورهم التي تحوي أضعاف ما في الدواوين, وهذا أمر لا يشك فيه من علم القضية

In fact, those who came before the emergence of these hadith collections were by far more knowledgeable in the Sunnah than those who came after them. *This is because a large part of the Sunnah that had reached them and had been authenticated by them might not have reached us except through unknown transmitters or a severed chain of narration, or might not have reached us at all*. Thus, it can be said that their "hadith compilations" were preserved in their hearts, which contained several times as much as that which is found in the physical collections, and the one who is well-versed in this issue will have no doubts about this [point].

(al-Harrani, Ibn Taymiyya, *Raf' al-Malam an al-A'immah al-A'lam*. Trans. by Abdul Hakim al-Matroudi as "Removal of the Blame from the Great Imams", Insight, p.335)

[15]

Did Ibn Khaldun show the weakness of *all* the reports on al-Mahdi?

Al-Albani also mentions that Ibn Khaldun failed to show even the alleged weakness of certain reports despite his going overboard to prove the weakness of most reports about al-Mahdi. He then states:

فمن نسب إليه أنه ضعف كل أحاديث المهدي فقد كذب عليه سهوا أو عمدا

"Whoever attributed to Ibn Khaldun the weakening of **all** the reports about al-Mahdi has, purposefully or inadvertently, lied about him." (*Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, Vol.4, 40)

Among those who lied upon Ibn Khaldun and said that he showed the weakness of *all* the reports are the neo-hadith rejecters Dr. Shahzad Saleem and Tariq Hashmi.

[16] Narrated Abu Sa'id al-Khudri:

أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم، قال: «يخرج في آخر أمتي المهدي يسقيه الله الغيث، وتخرج الأرض نباتها، ويعطي المال

صحاحا، وتكثر الماشية وتعظم الأمة، يعيش سبعا أو ثمانيا» يعني حججا

"The Messenger of Allah said: '*At the end of my nation, there will come forth al-Mahdi. Allah will give him spring rain to drink, and the earth will sprout forth its plants. He will give money away in fairness. The cattle will become numerous, and the nation will be great. He will live seven, or eight' that is, seasons.*" (*al-Mustadrak*, Hadith 8673)

[17]

Al-Dhahabi has agreed with al-Hakim and graded it as *sahih*. Al-Albani has also graded it as *sahih* and discussed it in detail in *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, No. 711

[18] Ibn Hibban was not alone in grading Sulayman bin 'Ubayd as reliable. Yahya bin Ma'in also graded him as trustworthy (*thiqah*) and Abu Hatim said he is truthful (*saduq*). See, Ibn Abi Hatim, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, Hyderabad: Da'ira al-Ma'arif al-'Uthmania, 1952, Vol.4, 129.

[19] The narration is:

عن محمد بن الحنفية، قال: كنا عند علي رضي الله عنه، فسأله رجل عن المهدي، فقال علي رضي الله عنه: هيهات، ثم عقد بيده سبعا، فقال: " ذاك يخرج في آخر الزمان

Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyah related: "We were with 'Ali, and someone asked him about the Mahdi. 'Ali replied: 'Look here.' Then he made a seven with his fingers and said: 'He is the one who will come forth at the end of time.' . . ."
(al-Mustadrak, Hadith 8659). Al-Dhahabi agreed with al-Hakim in grading it as *sahih* according to the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[20] Ibn Khaldun has himself stated that "Ahmad, Ibn Ma'in, Abu Hatim, an-Nasa'i and others considered him reliable." Though he mentions Bishr bin Marwan's criticism against him it was only because of his pro-Shi'a sentiments. Ibn Hibban has also counted him among the trustworthy.

[21] Showing the authenticity of the hadith "'*Ali is from me and I am from him, and he is the ally of every believer after me*," through the chains of narrators involving certain Shi'as, al-Albani writes:

أن العبرة في رواية الحديث إنما هو الصدق والحفظ، وأما المذهب فهو بينه وبين ربه، فهو حسيبه، ولذلك نجد صاحبي الصحيحين " غيرهما قد أخرجوا لكثير من الثقات المخالفين كالخوارج والشيعة وغيرهم

"What matters in narration of hadith is reliability and retention. As for doctrinal positions, it is between the narrator and Allah and He will put him to requital. For this reason we find authors of the two Sahihs, al-Bukhari and Muslim, and others besides them have narrated on the authority of many reliable narrators belonging to groups like the Khawarij, the Shi'a, and others." See, *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah* Vol.5, 262.

However, when a report *goes against stronger evidence* and comes through someone with specific inclinations linked to the subject matter of the hadith it might well be a problem. The report about al-Mahdi does not contradict anything in the entire Islamic rubric.

[22] The narration goes as:

عن أبو الصديق الناجي، عن أبي سعيد الخدري رضي الله عنه، قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «لا تقوم الساعة حتى تملأ الأرض ظلما وجورا وعدوانا، ثم يخرج من أهل بيتي من يملأها قسطا وعدلا كما ملئت ظلما وعدوانا»

Abu al-Siddiq al-Naji narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, who said: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'The Hour will not be established before the earth is filled with injustice, crime, and transgression. Then there will come forth from my family one who will fill it with equity and justice, as it had been filled with crime and transgression.'" (al-Mustadrak, Hadith 8669)

Al-Dhahabi, like al-Hakim, also graded it as *"sahih according to the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim."* Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut has graded it likewise in his research on Musnad Ahmad (Hadith 11313). Al-Albani has also graded it as *sahih* in *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah* (Vol.4, 39) and his research on Sahih Ibn Hibban (Hadith 6784)

[23] Al-Tabarani, Abu Sulayman, *Mu'jam al-Awsat*, Hadith 1075

[24] Here Maulana Thanwi misses the point. Most of the hadith scholars have carefully noted that Ibn Hibban has mentioned in al-Thiqat some narrators who were by themselves little-known (*majhul*) but they transmitted on the authority of trustworthy narrators and trustworthy narrators transmitted on their authority. According to the established opinion, however, this fact does not make a narrator trustworthy. This explains why al-Dhahabi still graded him as little-known (*majhul*). In relation to this tradition, however, see note 25 for further details.

[25] Not only Shu'bah (bin al-Hajjaj). Abu Hatim said that two other major hadith authorities 'Abdul Karim al-Jazri and Muhammad bin Salamah also narrated on his authority. See, Ibn Abi Hatim, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*, Vol.6, 18

It is pertinent to note that here we are discussing the chain of authorities: "Abu al-Wasil [Abdul Hamid bin Wasil] -> Abu al-Siddiq al-Naji (…?) -> Abu Sa'id"

Earlier we have discussed and shown the absence and weakness of objections to the following chains for the same narration: "'Awf bin Abi Jamilah -> Abu al-Siddiq al-Naji -> Abu Sa'id," and "Sulayman bin 'Ubayd -> Abu al-Siddiq al-Naji -> Abu Sa'id"

In fact a large number of narrators have reported this tradition on the authority of Abu al-Siddiq al-Naji from Abu Sa'id, so much so that al-Albani says:

بل هو عندي متواتر عن أبي الصديق عن أبي سعيد الخدري

"In fact, it is in my view continuously reported [*mutawatir*] from Abu al-Siddiq from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri." (*Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, Vol.4, 40)

It may also be noted that in a similar case elsewhere al-Albani has graded as *hasan* a report through Abu al-Wasil for its corroboration. See, *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, Hadith 1476

In view of this, Ibn Khaldun's criticism of this version of the narration alone is pointless.

[26] Following are the two narrations:

عن الجريري، عن أبي نضرة، قال: كنا عند جابر بن عبد الله فقال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «يكون في آخر أمتي خليفة يحثي المال حثيا، لا يعده عددا» قال قلت لأبي نضرة وأبي العلاء: أتريان أنه عمر بن عبد العزيز فقالا: لا.

It was narrated from Al-Jurairi that Nadrah said: "We were with Jabir bin 'Abdullah and he said: . . . 'The Messenger of Allah said: At the end of my Ummah there will be a Khalifah who will give out handfuls of wealth without counting it.'" He said: "I said to Abu Nadrah and Abul-'Ala': "Do you think that that was 'Umar bin 'Abdul-'Aziz?" They said: "No." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 7315 – 2913 (67))

and;

<div dir="rtl">عن أبي سعيد، قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «من خلفائكم خليفة يحثو المال حثيا، لا يعده عددا»</div>

It was narrated that Abu Sa'id said: "The Messenger of Allah said, "Among your Khulafah will be a Khalifah who will give out handfuls of wealth without counting it."" (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 73175 – 2914 (68))

[27] Muslim bin Hajjaj, *al-Sahih*, Hadith 395 – 156 (247). It is also from Jabir bin 'Abdullah. In Sahih Muslim, it does not mention the name al-Mahdi. However, in the narration from al-Harith bin Abi Usamah the name al-Mahdi is categorically mentioned:

<div dir="rtl">ينزل عيسى بن مريم، فيقول أميرهم المهدي: تعال صل بنا</div>

'Isa bin Maryam will descend and their leader, al-Mahdi, will say: 'Come and lead us in prayer . . .' See, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Manar al-Munir fi al-Sahih wa al-Da'if*. Aleppo: Maktaba al-Matbu'at al-Islamiyya, 1970. 147, Hadith 338. Ibn al-Qayyim said, 'Its chain of narrators is good [*jayyid*].'

For a detailed discussion on the reliability of this report, answer to objections and its significance see, al-Albani's *Silsilah al-Ahadith al-Sahihah*, Hadith 2236

[28] Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Vol.2, 184

[29] *ibid.*, 169

[30] *ibid.*, 165

[31] *ibid.*, 166

[32] *Mudallis* is someone who is known for omitting a narrator from the chain of transmission of a hadith in a subtle manner. Such a narrator narrates a hadith, which he had not heard from a person whom he met and with whom he was contemporary, in such a manner as to give the impression that he had heard it directly from him. This practice is known as *tadlis*.

[33] *ibid.*, 169

[34] Even though scholars including Maulana Thanwi have mentioned various interpretations of this narration, it is agreed upon that it is weak. 'Ali bin Sultan al-Qari (aka Mullah Ali al-Qari) states:

<div dir="rtl">

أن حديث: لا مهدي إلا عيسى بن مريم ضعيف باتفاق المحدثين

</div>

"The hadith: 'There is no Mahdi except 'Isa', is weak by the consensus of the scholars of hadith." See, al-Qari, 'Ali bin Sultan, *Mirqat al-Mafatih*, Beirut: Dar al-Fekr, 2002, Vol.8, 3448

[35] It is a reference to the well-known hadith:

<div dir="rtl">

عن أبي هريرةَ، عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم، قال: ‫''‬ لم يتكلم في المهد إلا ثلاثة: عيسى ابن مريم، وصبي كان في زمان جريج، وصبي آخر

</div>

Narrated Abu Hurairah: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "None spoke in the cradle but three: 'Isa bin Maryam, a child during the time of Juraij, and another child." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith 8072; also al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Hadith 3436)

[36] al-Sajistani, Abu Dawud, *al-Sunan*, Hadith 4294; classified as hasan by al-Albani

[37] Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Hadith 2015

[38] al-Sajistani, Abu Dawud, *al-Sunan*, Hadith 499; classified as *hasan sahih* by al-Albani

[39] Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Hadith 5747

[40] Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Hadith 6990

[41] Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Vol.2, 190

[42]

"*al-Shajrah al-Nu'maniya fi al-Dawlah al-'Usmaniya*" by Ibn al-'Arabi. Ahmed Zildzic in his doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley, refers to it as *"a brief and confusing astrological text replete with obscure innuendos."* (*Friend and Foe: The early Ottoman reception of Ibn 'Arabi*, 82)

There are a number of commentaries on it, e.g. Sadr al-Din al-Qunuwi's "*al-Lam'ah al-Nuraniyah fi Mushkilat al-Nu'maniyah*", al-Maqari's "*al-Qawa'id al-Siriyyah fi hal Mushkilat al-Shajrah al-Nu'maniya*", and Ibn al-Amir al-Safadi's "*Rumuz al-Shajrah al-Nu'maniya*"

[43]

Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, Vol.2, 324 (Chapter 5, Section 4)

[44] *ibid.*, 229 (Chapter 3, Section 52)

[45] *ibid.*, Vol.1, 222-223 (Chapter 1, Section 6)